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The six hundred and eighteenth meeting of the Club was held at the Rembrandt Hotel, London, on the 15th September, 1964.

Chairman: Captain C. R. S. Pitman

Members present 12; guests 7.

Mr. S. J. J. F. Davies spoke on five doves of the genus *Streptopelia* and their hybrids, showing how voice and display may indicate relationship.

Instability of feather pigmentation in the White Helmet Shrike *Prionops plumatus*

by WALTER J. LAWSON

Received 18th May, 1964

During a recent attempt at a reassessment of the geographical variation exhibited by the southern African populations of *Prionops plumatus* I was struck by the number of entirely white-headed birds in collections. Normally the head-top is grey with a black bar behind the ear-coverts and with the throat grey as well. There also appeared to be some variation in the degree of pigmentation of these parts, which did not appear to have any geographical constancy.

The entirely white-headed birds which seem to appear in all populations usually have the throat white and the black bar behind the ear-coverts absent or a shade of grey.

This inconstancy prompted me to wash with soap and water a specimen

with a grey head and throat and black bar behind the ear-coverts, and after drying and fluffing the specimen it was noticed that all pigmentation on the head and throat had been washed out leaving a white-headed bird with a white throat and side of head.

This instability of the grey and black pigments of the head is of interest as it casts doubt on the use of the head coloration as a character of sub-specific import. This solubility of pigmentation in plumage has been observed in a few species of birds, but a detailed investigation of the problem needs to be undertaken by chemists.

On birds new for New Guinea or with a larger range than previously known

by A. HOOGERWERF

(continued from page 96—May 1964)

17. *Excalfactoria chinensis* (Linn.)

King Quail

Because the range of this quail is much more extensive than indicated in Mayr's list, it seems important to publish my experiences with the species. Mayr remarks: "Eastern New Guinea, westward on the south coast as far as the Oriomo River, on the north coast to the Kumusi and upper Watut Rivers; not yet recorded from Astrolabe Bay and Humboldt Bay". But afterwards Bergman obtained seven specimens from the Vogelkop (Gyldenstolpe 6) and van den Assem (1) mentions the species for Ifar near Hollandia (Humboldt Bay) and the same author observed it in the grasslands around Enerotali (Wissel Lakes) at 1800 m. above sea level, where several specimens were secured earlier (Junge 9).

I found this quail in nearly all suitable areas visited by me in New Guinea, in the southern part as well as in the Vogelkop area. In Kurik's ricefields I saw it only on three occasions, viz. on 10th March, 1959, 21st March, 1962 (solitary birds) and on 1st September, 1962 when six together came up from the side of a ditch covered with grass and other low growing plants, surrounded by dry ricefields. The species is a resident in the extensive savannahs surrounding Kurik, along the Kumbe and Maro Rivers and in the Moppa plains east of Merauke, in the plains near the shore between the Kumbe and Bian Rivers and in the Gali Ephata area. Though observations were most plentiful during the dry season (June till November), those during the rainy season could not be called rare: February (4), March (3), April (4), May (1) and December (2). In those months the species was observed sometimes in very swampy localities.

On 25th August, 1960 a specimen was caught at Kurik and kept in an aviary.

In the northern part of New Guinea I saw the birds every day during my visit to the Kebar Valley (Vogelkop, about 500 m. above sea level) in October 1962; on 25th February, 1963 some specimens were seen along the Anggi Lakes (Vogelkop, about 1200 m. above sea level) and in March 1963 it was not uncommon in a dry lalang savannah near Ransiki (Geelvink Bay, sea level). Usually the birds were seen alone or in pairs; the observation of six on 1st September, 1962 may be considered an exception.